

Which Church Should Be Separated from the State?

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Movements to restrict the expression of religion and morality are rampant. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals recently ruled that the pledge of allegiance is unconstitutional because the words "under God" violate the separation of church and state.

Prohibitions of Christmas displays on public property, displays of the Ten Commandments in courtrooms, ministers giving graduation addresses and prayers before football games are rejected on the same grounds: "the constitutional separation of church and state."

In Northport, FL, an 8-year-old girl was banned from singing the campfire favorite "Kum Ba Yah" at her day camp because it repeats the word "Lord." (1).

Eugene, OR banned nonreligious symbols such as Christmas trees (2). Madison, WI atheists said President Bush shouldn't use a Bible for the oath of office (3). A Houston elementary schoolteacher confiscated Bibles as gifts by a student, fearing violations of the separation of church and state (4). Bowing to pressure from the ACLU, the Newton County, GA school system erased the word "Christmas" from its school calendars.(5) In St. Paul, red poinsettias were banned from a display at the county courthouse. (6)

The phrase "separation of church and state" is not in the constitution. The words "church" and "separation" are not even contained in the first amendment, yet the Constitution is supposed to mandate the separation of church and state. The phrase is contained in Thomas Jefferson's letter written to the Danbury Baptist Association. These Baptists had heard a rumor that the Congregationalists might become the national religion. This alarmed people who knew about persecution in England by the state-established church. Jefferson made it clear that the government would not establish a national religion. Jefferson's personal letter was not even proposed legislation, much less part of the Constitution. It had no legal authority whatsoever.

We also need to consider briefly the meaning of the word "church," a collective noun meaning a called-out group of people. When used of Christians in the Bible, it is used in two ways: the universal church and local churches.

We use the word "church" a third way, of a denomination, referring to local churches acting collectively according to their creed. For example, the Methodist denomination consists of all churches that function collectively in that denomination. Most denominations do not regard themselves as the universal church, but as collections of congregations.

This third use doesn't occur in the Bible as none of well over 1000 denominations claiming allegiance to Christ existed then, as the vast majority of them freely admit.

This denominational use is the one Jefferson used in his letter to the Danbury Baptists. Jefferson wanted to remove all fears that the state would endorse any denomination. The people did not want freedom "from" religion, but freedom "of" religion.

This is not the way separation of church and state is brandished today. The separation of denomination and state is not at the root of the present escalating restrictions.

For example, what local church, universal church, or denomination is involved when children recite the pledge of allegiance? Absolutely none; the children are not a local church, the universal church, nor a denomination. If the separation of church and state were constitutional, there is no church involved.

What church is involved when local governments have Christmas displays? None.

What church is involved when ministers give graduation addresses or offer prayers at a game? None. Likewise, no church is involved when the ten commandments are displayed in courtrooms, "Kum Ba Yah" is sung at a day camp, nonreligious symbols are displayed by local governments, Presidents-elect are sworn into office, students giving Bibles during school parties, or poinsettias are displayed in a courthouse.

Those wanting to eradicate all semblance of religion and morality from society shouldn't presume to use the "constitutional separation of church and state," when neither the Constitution nor any church is even involved! The present abhorrence of religion and morality didn't exist among the Founding Fathers, and no one explained it better than John Adams: "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." In Adams' view, erecting a Christmas scene on the lawn of a public library should not produce a rant to obliterate such symbols from public view, while a few feet inside, pedophiles and porn addicts indulge in their perversity over the Internet at public expense.

1. Associated Press, August 13, 2000
 2. "Ban Holiday Symbols?" *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Joel Connally, Dec. 19, 2001
 3. "Madison-based Atheist Group says Bush Shouldn't Use Bible," Associated press, December 18, 2000
 4. "Elementary Schoolteacher Seizes Bibles Given as Gifts," *Houston Chronicle*, from Associated Press, April 13, 2001
 5. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Henry Farber, Nov. 22, 2000
 6. *New York Daily News*, "Hands off Christmas," Bill O'Reilly, Dec. 9, 2002
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